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July 16, 2001

Jonas Minton, Deputy Director
California Department of Water Resources
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Dear Jonas:

Bulletin 160 can not determine the adequacy of the State's water supply unless the adequacy of the future agricultural water supply is related to the future adequacy of the domestic food supply. The consumptive use of water in the Central Valley that is needed to produce food depends on establishing a policy regarding maintenance of the food supply. Alternatively Bulletin 160 could analyze the water supply needed with different levels of maintenance of the domestic food supply.

This relationship is discussed in the attached July 2nd memo entitled "CALFED and Our Dependence on the Unsustainable Depletion of Natural Resources". I would appreciate hearing your thoughts on this issue.

Sincerely,

Alex Hildebrand
South Delta Water Agency

cc John Herrick

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July 2, 2001

See Attached Name
and Address List

CALFED and Our Dependence on the Unsustainable Depletion
of Natural Resources

Neither the State nor the Nation has any plan for the food supply that will be needed to feed the population in year 2025. There is, therefore, no consideration of the agricultural water supply that will be needed to produce that food. This policy vacuum is being used to condone taking large quantities of land and water from the production of food to meet urban and environmental needs. The reduction in agricultural land and water then combines with the need to feed a growing population to induce an increasing reliance on the unsustainable depletion of land and water.

The Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA) dictated that 800,000 acre feet of water be taken from the production of food for environmental needs. Urban sprawl every year takes farm land and the water supply previously used on that land to produce food and converts both the land and water to urban use.

Now, CALFED is accelerating this depletion of natural resources. It proposes converting, by various means, large quantities of land and water from the production of food to environmental and urban use. Water for the Environmental Water Account is taken from agriculture. Agricultural land in the Delta and elsewhere is converted to wetlands which consume more water than when the land is used to produce food. This increased water demand is also taken from agriculture elsewhere. Other agricultural lands are proposed to be fallowed. Water transfers are proposed to take water from agriculture by government financed water purchases. Sales of agricultural water are also promoted to provide water for urban water users for whom water is a small budget item and who can therefore outbid farmers for whom water is a large budget item.

CALFED confuses water supply issues with ambiguous terms. It does not say it will increase the adequacy of the water supply, it says it will increase "water supply reliability." This does not mean that we can rely on a more adequate overall supply. It means we can rely on a supply that may be more inadequate. They talk about "water storage," but they favor types of storage that have low water yield per unit of storage and which consume more power than they generate.

The World Watch Institute estimates that one sixth of the world's food supply is already produced by the unsustainable depletion of groundwater resources. In the Midwestern United States, it is alleged that the groundwater resource is being depleted at a rate comparable to the flow of the Colorado River. In California, we got through the last drought by depleting groundwater resources by six to eight million acre feet. This depletion has only partially been restored. In the next drought, we will need more depletion because of increased demand. This unsustainable net long term depletion of groundwater will ultimately lead to a catastrophe when we can no longer meet our needs in a drought. CALFED is hastening that time.

There are some who believe farmers need merely use less water. This stems in part from confusion between applied water and consumed water. If a toilet is flushed in a coastal city, the water that is used typically goes to the ocean and is lost. When a toilet is flushed in Sacramento, the water is treated and goes back in to the river for reuse. A low flush toilet in San Francisco therefore saves water. A low flush toilet in Sacramento saves distribution and treating costs but does not save water. The same is true of agriculture. In order to grow a pound of biomass, a given variety of crop must take up a relatively fixed amount of water through its roots and evaporate it through its leaves. If excess water is applied to crops in the Central Valley, it is not consumed and ends up in a reusable stream flow or groundwater.

The Feinstein and Calvert bills in Congress propose to fund CALFED and then fund supplemental actions to provide for CALFED's water supply deficiencies. However, the amount of supplement that is needed cannot be determined until CALFED's water supply deficiencies are acknowledged and quantified. Furthermore, the extent to which a deficiency in agricultural water supply is recognized depends on whether it is believed that we should maintain the domestic food supply and, if so, whether we should maintain our present food production capability or our present per capita food production capability. We now supply 25 percent of the nation's table food. Will we continue to do so as the population grows and what will happen if we don't? Japan now imports 60 percent of its food supply. We now provide part of that import. What will happen if we stop exporting?

We are also depleting our soil and water resources and our long term ability to produce food by salinating the soils and groundwater of lands receiving water via the Delta Mendota Canal. That water contains about seven times as much salt as the water exported at Friant. We have already accumulated between thirty and forty million tons of imported salt in the soils and

groundwaters of the CVP service area within the San Joaquin watershed. This salt accumulation will ultimately destroy the production of food on those lands.

In summary, we are already highly dependent on continuing the depletion of the water and lands which provide our food supply. CALFED, if implemented per its Record of Decision, will accelerate that depletion and make a very serious water and food shortage more imminent. Neither CALFED nor the Congress has acknowledged this threat to the future of California and the Nation. Nor has there been any evaluation of the future water supply needed for the production of food.

/s/

Alexander Hildebrand
Secretary, South Delta Water Agency